

Selective Memory

Memory, it seems to me, is encapsulated into little pockets of partial truth.

Recently I caught myself thinking that I had never been strongly interested in fantasy stories about magic and dragons. "Oh no no no, I never had very much interest in that sort of stuff," I was thinking to myself "I always mainly liked science fiction, technology, spaceships, time machines..."

Then I stopped and realised that I was wrong. There had been times in my life when I was very, very, very interested in magic and fantasy type of stories. When I was 17 I read *The Lord of the Rings*, *Farmer Giles of Ham*, *Smith of Wootton Major*, *Tree and Leaf*, *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Jewel in the Skull*, *Tarnsman of Gor* and *The Wizard of Earthsea*. I had a copy of *Magick in Theory and Practice* by Crowley, I often browsed in the Atlantis bookshop in Bloomsbury, I owned Tarot cards and a copy of the *I Ching*.

So what was all this rubbish about never being very interested in magic and similar stuff? It's not a false memory. It's a selective memory. From my perspective now at the age of 71 I can look back on all of the times when technology and science were far more interesting to me than magical fantasy and I can make the mistake of thinking that I was always the same.

But I wasn't.

When I stop and think about it I realise that memory becomes compartmentalised and that, when we are in one of the compartments, we think with less than the full facts and arrive at something less than a correct view of the world around us.

One of the values of fantasy is that it reminds us of the human mind's ability to construct elaborate but nevertheless wrong versions of our lives and surroundings.

This is Pataphysics. The building of castles in the air. The leaf on the twig on the branch where there is no tree; Or where there is a tree but no roots perhaps. A currency based on the exchange rate of a golden bough. Achilles and the Tortoise or the infinite fractal coastline of Britain. A skyhook.

I'm interested in the apparent polarity of Bertolt Brecht's "Alienation Effect" and the Surrealist Movement's construction of dream realities. It seems to me that both of these forms of presentation are shockingly cogent and needed in our current world of media overload. Surrealism and Alienation are like the left and right hands of self awareness. Reality becomes the dream and then the fourth wall is broken, revealing the construction of the dream and the construction of our pocket reality. Our phenomenological "poche".

Examples of the reality merging with dream and then being subject to an alienation effect would include L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* behind the curtain and Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*. Another way of doing it is Jorge Luis Borges'

The Garden of Forking Paths where the dreamlike musing on the multiple nature of reality is shocked back to the reality of brutal war.

The dreamer is shaken into wakefulness. We come back to reality but reality is strange in its own way too.

John Lennon putting his finger through the non-existent glass of his little granny glasses, wiping the dirt from the corner of his eye. Johnny Rotten shouting "Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?"

Deconstructing the dream even as we build the dream. Real understanding and mindfulness is in seeing that we make the conventions which we then treat as reality. It is both one thing and t'other.

In science fiction stories of time travel we are often asked to contemplate how the creation of a contradictory time line, such as in the famous "grandfather paradox" could, perhaps, destroy the nature of reality itself. Other fictions suggest that the universe might not be bothered by paradox at all and that it might be only in our minds that the problem would exist. Perhaps the universe could happily tolerate a person whose father never really existed on the same time line, just so long as he existed on some other time line.

Brian Aldiss wrote, in the 1950s, a wonderful short story called *The Failed Men* where people in the future are so traumatised by meaninglessness that they no longer wish to exist. The exact nature of their predicament is inexplicable in linear language because you would only know the exact nature of that predicament if you were experiencing that very predicament which you cannot communicate to someone who isn't experiencing it.

Michael Moorcock, from the 1960s onward, wrote a long series of multiple stories of Jerry Cornelius and his associates who exist in a multiverse where the catastrophe has already occurred and reality is already in a state of ongoing paradoxical collapse. The story is told even when it is destroying itself.

Life goes on. Somehow.

The ego imagines itself to be a continuous unified person because it remembers being and doing and having all of the experiences of its life. In reality we are constructing that ego all the time as we go along. The continuous thing is the continuously constructed identity linking the various personae in a thread of being.

The body is recreating itself in a continuous process of cells dying and being replaced by new cells. The mind is reconstructing itself by the day and the hour and then minute. We are like the sweeping brush of Trigger from *Only Fools and Horses*. How many new bristles and how many new handles will we have in our lifetimes? Who the hell are we, anyway? Among the forking paths of the garden the branches of the trees grow through all of time and space, joining with the mythological tree of all trees, watered by the mythological river of all rivers which flow through Thomas Hardy's Wessex and Charlotte Brontë's Angria, through China Mieville's Beszel and Ul Qoma.